DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 943 SO 016 816

TITLE	Participation of Women: The Reality in 1985.
INSTITUTION	Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France).
PUB DATE	Jan 85
NOTE	17p.
PUB TYPE	Journal Articles (080) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Council of Europe Forum; spec insert Jan 1985
EDRS PRICE	MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	Developed Nations; Developing Nations; Economics; *Females; *Feminism; Labor Economics; Laws; *Political Issues; *Political Power; Power Structure; Rural Areas; Rural Urban Differences; Sex Discrimination; Unions; Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

A compilation of 10 articles presents perspectives on the issue of female political participation. "The Patriarchy Takes a Ribbing" (Benoite Groult) looks at women as the primary agents for economic and political change. "Women and Political Power in Europe" (Mariette Sineau) considers variations in female responsibility and status in policy-making bodies. "Running the Country?--the Role of Rural Women" (Anna Mangrioti) focuses on the impact of rural traditions and attitudes in limiting female participation in rural political life. "Sexual Violence and the Law in Italy" (Guido Modona) looks at proposals for reform of Italian laws regarding sexual violence in criminal law. "Sex Discrimination in the United Kingdom" (David Pannick) examines a recent case heard by the European Court of Human Rights concerning sex discrimination in United Kingdom immigration rules. "Unions and the Working Woman" (Hortense Horburger) outlines the difficulties involved in organizing working women. "To Denounce without Distorting" (Zoulika Boukortt) recounts the experiences in a young Algerian woman's life in two cultures. "Resolving Sexual Harassment in Canada" (Shelagh M'Gonigle) looks at Canada's growing recognition of sexual harassment as a legal problem. "A Woman's Life in Switzerland" (Gabrielle Nanchen) considers whether the recent election of a female representative to the Federal Council constitutes a real step forward for women in that country. "Violence Against Women: A Scandinavian Perspective" (Annika Snare) describes how public attitudes towards violence against women have changed in the past decade. (LP)

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FORUM

COUNCIL OF EUROPE Quarterly 1/85

ED261943

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PARTICIPATION OF WOMEN: THE REALITY IN 1985

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"Let us not deceive ourselves. We do not yet have real power. We are still at the stage of tokenism, where women who force their way into areas that were hitherto forbidden to them are considered as phenomena whose presence results from a sort of compromise: men of power tolerate them provided that they do not push their desire for change too far. Those who accept and want change, progress and the breakthrough of women are no less preoccupied—however generous their intentions—by this competition which they would gladly do without."

Yvette Roudy

—French Minister for Women's Rights

Extract from "A cause d'elles"—published by Albin Michel (1985)

The patriarchy takes a ribbing

Ever since the creation of woman from the rib of man—contrary to all biological likelihood—we all know what relations between men and women have been like. Eve didn't even enjoy the privilege of being made from Adam's brain, which is how Zeus produced Athena; that could no doubt have been construed as over-flattering.

In 1985, we have to speak of relations between women and men rather than between men and women, for the male of the human species is no longer the fomenter of change. Actually, he has not evolved very much; it is woman who has changed beyond all recognition. The male is hanging on—to tradition, to past structures which served him so well, to the reassuring Mother image, to the image of woman as an object, which gives him an easy superiority, to the wife-housekeeper who relieves him of the burden of organising his daily life and brings up children who still—at least in some countries—bear only his name.

He is even more afraid of change than we are. He fights it everywhere—in different ways to be sure—but in every country where he can (and that means *every* country) he bans change or obstructs it by any means available to him, which may range from the most subtle to the most violent.

We know what inspired language thinkers from Aristotle to Nietzsche, from St Paul to Mohammed, from Rousseau to Freud, have used to justify keeping the weaker sex in rein. We know how they have all taken the doll to pieces and explained the workings of our intelligence, which is limited because it is located as much in the womb as in the skull (*tota mulier in utero*). They have described our subconscious and our sexual organs; these are so deficient that we always resent not having theirs. They have described our libido, which is in an unenviable state—always too much or not there at all.

And for a long time we believed it all and meekly accepted it.

Until the 20th century, that is, when—barring a few heroic voices from the past—women suddenly found the power of speech and writing, and published more books in 30 years than in 30 centuries! Before, women had only their own little histories; now they are making history. And we are finding out that those old theories which we took for granted, the hollow phrases such as "the eternal feminine" or "the mamma or the whore" hold captive living beings with ambitions and potential, as varied and unclassifiable as men themselves.

It is understandable that the change should have thrown society into a panic and that this new freedom should have created anxiety in women suddenly faced with a mosaic of often conflicting choices. For freedom, too, has to be learned, and our dreams of independence do not always match up to our experience of day-to-day living. Habits, inhibitions and bur-

dens from the past can turn the gap into a yawning chasm.

For women's emancipation—and this is what distinguishes it from any other emancipation—is not to be won just legally and professionally, but individually as well, within each human relationship. It is won in parliament, but also in solitude, within a couple, in bed or in front of the kitchen sink. And it is often the victories which are the most costly and the easiest to undo. Yet professional equality coupled with inequality at home is a mere fraud, a trap in which all too many women, lightheaded at the thought of all the paths being opened to them, have wasted all their energies.

1975 saw the beginning of the Decade for Women, an age of great combats, symbolic gestures and militant revolt. Sooner or later, women discovered that the 46,000 million hours of unpaid domestic chores they performed each year were not a natural expression of their love but a type of slavery which afforded them neither security nor prestige and from which there was no retirement. They had all they needed to make them happy, had they not? But what man would have wanted it?

Ten years on, at the end of the Decade, we are only at the beginning of this enormous change. For women, and men with them, are surging along roads with no signposts or safety barriers and without knowing exactly where they may be heading, for there is no historical precedent for the situation we are experiencing now, and everyone has to decide her (or his) own models. What happens to relations between the sexes when, thanks to science and a test tube full of sperm, one woman can give birth to another woman's baby? When a professor of biology announces that after the menopause a woman will still be able to carry and give birth to a child produced from a pre-frozen ovum of hers?

This is ushering in an era so revolutionary that consciences are being disturbed and committees of ethics are mushrooming.

One thing is certain, whether we like it or not: women "ain't wot they use ter be". ■

BENOÎTE GROULT
Writer

Women and political power in Europe

Insistence on the fact that women are a minority in political circles could well lead one to believe that women are on the fringe in all sectors of society. In fact, the role played by women and the levels of responsibility they occupy in policy-making bodies is extremely variable in both geographical and historical terms.

Geographically speaking, the Council of Europe countries may be divided into two groups as far as women's presence in, for example, parliaments is concerned. Whereas in Scandinavia and the Netherlands women account for between 20% and 30% of the total number of parliamontarians, they represent only 4.8% in Spain, 4.3% in Greece and a mere 3.5% in the United Kingdom. This last score, an exception to the north-south divide, means that the birthplace of liberal democracy and the suffragette movement occupies the 17th position in Europe, below certain Mediterranean countries which cannot boast the same traditions.

From the historical point of view, countries again fall into two divergent categories. In some—such as France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy and Turkey—women's political status has declined or stagnated over the past 40 years. In others—the Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands—the post-1945 period has been marked by the rapid feminisation of political assemblies (not only parliaments but also regional and local councils). Between 1975 and 1985 alone, the proportion of women members of parliament more than doubled in the Netherlands and rose by over 65% in Norway and Denmark. Elsewhere, women were given the right to vote and to stand for election so recently (in 1971 in Switzerland, in 1984 in Liechtenstein) that it is still too early to discern any trend.

Levels of responsibility

Women's degree of participation also varies from one level of responsibility to another. It is often high in peripheral bodies but lower in more central ones. At a time when parliaments are surrendering some of their influence to civil servants, it may be considered disturbing that women are gaining ground in the former rather than the latter. In all cases their presence in the higher spheres of administration is slight, reaching 5% of the total in exceptional instances and nowhere exceeding 10%. Although more and more women have been included in governments (particularly in the last ten years), they are more likely to be given junior than senior posts.

In Italy, for example, since 1951—when de Gasperi appointed the first woman minister—50 women have been junior ministers but only five have been senior ministers in 33 years and 37 governments. Generally speaking, women are still usually denied the pre-eminent portfolios (treasury, justice, foreign affairs etc), although it is true that there are more and more exceptions to the well-known rule of women's specialisation in social affairs and education. For instance, in October 1984, Elisabeth Kopp was appointed Head of the Department of Justice and the Police in the Swiss Federal Council, while in July 1984, Edith Cresson was promoted Minister for Industrial Redeployment and External Trade in the French Government.

The still minor part played by women in politics is above all a reflection of a subordinate economic status. This is evidenced by the fact that the feminisation of local councils is occurring mainly in urban areas,

where women with the "right" candidate profile (highly educated and working in skilled occupations) are to be found. But there are also internal political reasons for the male domination of positions of power, and these are worth mentioning.

Unfavourable to female candidates

The highly personalised electoral system where voters choose only one candidate—as opposed to the more neutral system where a list of candidates is chosen—has always been unfavourable to female candidates. It gives an advantage to local dignitaries, thus encouraging the holding of two or more political offices by the same person, a practice that is itself a big hindrance to any further opening up of political circles.

Secondly, wherever the system of indirect suffrage has been introduced, it does little to foster the election of women to higher assemblies, as it tends to give a greater say to rural representatives who are more inclined to vote for men like themselves than for women.

Last but not least, the feminisation of political bodies has to contend with the unwritten oligarchic rules of party organisations. Such organisations often find it convenient to use the weakness of female activism as a pretext for under-representing women on their executive bodies, or the misogyny of public opinion for refusing to adopt women as candidates. These anti-feminist practices, which are more common in right-wing than in left-wing circles, and in central and southern Europe than in northern Europe, have generally been receding under pressure from militant women. A few years ago, indeed, some parties (such as the French Socialist Party and the Dutch Labour Party) agreed to allocate to women a certain proportion of seats on their executive bodies as well as a certain proportion of candidatures.

Limits to positive discrimination

Can equality of rights in politics lead rapidly on to greater equality of opportunity between the sexes? A change in customs, even political ones, is probably one of the most difficult changes to achieve. The failure of the French "quota" act[1] revealed the limits to a policy of positive discrimination. Some milder forms of action might prove just as effective. One of them would be to run information campaigns on the need for greater participation by women in the management of public affairs.

In general terms, the dissemination of a different image of women by the media or by non-governmental organisations might do much to bring about a more egalitarian view of relations between the sexes. But perhaps what women need most is a policy that encourages true power sharing. There springs to mind, of course, the introduction of rules to limit the number of political offices that may be held by one person; but measures could also be taken to promote the status and working conditions of the people's representatives, such as the organisation of suitable training, the provision of *crèches* and other communal amenities and an increase in the monetary allowances paid to politicians. This could put an end to the dilemma "politics or children?" Politics could in this way be opened up to other categories of people besides local dignitaries and senior civil servants, who are often the only ones able, thanks to the financial resources and time at their disposal, to stand for elective office. ■

MARIETTE SINEAU
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1. On 18 November 1982 the Constitutional Council rejected, on the ground of the equality of all citizens before the law, the provision in the new Electoral Act which sought to guarantee to women a quota of 25% of the total number of candidatures in municipal elections in towns with more than 3,500 inhabitants.

Even though more and more women are to be found in government today, it is still rare for them to reach ministerial rank. Edith Cresson, French Minister for Industrial Redeployment and External Trade, is a notable exception.

Council of Europe action in favour of the participation of women

At France's invitation, the Council of Europe is to organise the first *Ministerial Conference on equality between women and men* in the first quarter of 1986. For a number of years, the Organisation's 21 member states have been working to promote the involvement of women in every aspect of social, economic, political and cultural life. Recommendations and publications on the subject include:

Recommendations

- No R (81) 6 on the *participation of women and men in an equitable proportion in committees and other bodies set up in the Council of Europe*
- No R (84) 17 on *equality between women and men in the media*. This text includes a list of measures designed to ensure application of the principle of equal treatment between women and men in the recruitment, training, remuneration, promotion and other conditions of employment of media workers.
- No R (85) 2 on *legal protection against sex discrimination*. Appended to this text are principles for promoting equality by legislation. They concern equality in the field of employment (equal right of access to work, training, promotion etc), social security, taxation, civil rights, political rights and the acquisition and loss of nationality. Member states are also asked to take measures of a general character in order to encourage the equal involvement of women and men in public life, education and training. The recommendation ends with a statement to the effect that legislation should contain appropriate deterrents to discrimination in the form of remedies and sanctions, and make provision for rapid, inexpensive and suitable proceedings as well as free legal assistance where this is necessary.

Publications

The Steering Committee for Human Rights of the Council of Europe has produced a study unique of its kind concerning *the situation of women in the political process*. It is the result of a Europe-wide inquiry and contains details about the situation in the 21 member states. This is the latest and fullest analysis of the ways and means by which women in Europe take part in political life; it brings into focus aspects of the phenomenon that previously received little or no attention.

The Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers has recently released a report, drawn up by a special multidisciplinary committee of governmental experts. This report constitutes in fact an action programme designed to guide the Organisation's work over the next few years in seeking to step-up women's participation in the political process in a balanced representation with men.

The experts' report—which took as its starting point a study on the situation of women in the political process in Europe prepared by independent specialists—considers the phenomenon of participation against the backdrop of democracy and the strengthening of democratic institutions through the full, active and responsible participation of all sections of society in the democratic process.

A series of broad-ranging proposals for action and for further studies are set out in the report relating to: national machinery for promoting equality (e.g. equal status boards, special ministries for equality between the sexes, etc.); affirmative action and temporary special measures; the status and conditions of political posts; the selection of candidates in political parties; the role of women's organisations and associations in preparing women for political posts; formal and non-formal education for democratic citizenship; the educational role of the media in preparing women for democratic citizenship and stimulating participation.

Other aspects of the report comprise proposals and comments on the special problems of rural women in relation to participation particularly at the local level, the role assumed by women elites in the political process (i.e. women who have effectively integrated and assumed positions of responsibility in the parties) and the effect of different modalities of financing political parties and campaigns on the presence of women candidates in key positions.

The report also comments on the position of women in publicly appointed bodies and the civil service as well as on the correlation between women's entry into paid employment and their political awareness.

The next stage will consist of transmission of the action programme to the competent committees and bodies in the Organisation with a view to following-up the proposals made. Documents may be obtained from the Directorate of Human Rights, Council of Europe, BP 431 R6, F-67006 Strasbourg-Cedex.

Within the Council of Europe, the Committee for equality between women and men—of which the Secretary is Mrs Claudette Apprill—is responsible for preparing a Ministerial Conference on this theme that will take place in 1986. This committee has itself produced a study tracing the historical development, with a descriptive analysis, of "national machinery" set up in member states of the Council of Europe to promote equality between women and men: this was published at the end of 1982. The details will be brought up to date in 1985 in a companion volume which will also contain a study of non-institutional machinery. Another study due to appear in 1985 concerns positive action, that is to say the "remedial measures" that must be taken if sexual equality is to become established as a recognised fact.

Running the country? —the role of rural women

Rural women play a far smaller role in political life than urban women. They have less access to decision-making processes, not because the centres of decision-making are in the cities, but rather because of the traditions and attitudes of their families and of rural society.

Recent research shows that the main road to a career in national politics is through active involvement in local government, together with membership of a political party. Yet, as statistics show, rural women participate less in local politics than do urban women. In local government, there are more women mayors and councillors in large towns than in small rural towns in all countries where figures are available. In Sweden, 50% of Stockholm's town councillors are women, whilst in smaller places the figure ranges down to 15%. In the largest towns in France, women won over 20% of the seats on town councils in the 1977 elections, but the average in rural towns was only 9%. In Greece, over 7% of town councillors but only 1% of village councillors are women (1982).

Women from rural areas have far less say in local political life than their counterparts in towns. To what extent is the weight of rural traditions and attitudes responsible for this?

In order to become an elected representative in parliament, a person has to be selected as a candidate by a political party. When the selection is made exclusively by local (rural) party bodies, fewer women tend to be selected, and elected, than when it is made by the national party bodies. Moreover, rural women are less likely to have the qualifications that parties seek in candidates, such as experience of holding a position of responsibility, preferably with an electoral mandate.

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The rigours of a lifetime's work reflected in the face of this peasant women

Belonging to trade unions, professional organisations, co-operatives, women's or youth organisations is another way of participating in political life. But, with the exception of co-operatives, in which women's membership is often very low, the membership of all such organisms is much smaller in rural than in urban areas.

Financial independence, political maturity

For most women, going out to work is an essential first step to achieving equality with men and to becoming politically mature—through moving out of the home and into the community, acquiring a measure of financial independence and joining work-related organisations. But this is true only of paid employment. Most women working in rural communities are not paid at all but are "unpaid members of family enterprises" or family helpers.

Of every 100 working women in the EEC, about 8 are unpaid members of a family enterprise. In countries with large agricultural populations they are many times more. Generally, such workers do not have the legal occupational status that would protect them in case of death or divorce, or ensure they are covered by social insurance. Though in practical and ethical terms they may be equal partners in the farm, they are diminished when their lack of legal status prevents them from completing administrative formalities or representing the farm in farming organisations and co-operatives.

The production function in a farming family is different from in the rest of the economy, since it is based on unpaid work and on the dependence of the family helpers on the head or owner of the enterprise, who is often the head of the family. This dependence is complete for working wives who do not share in the management and allocation of their earnings, and often it will spread to attitudes. If the patriarchal protector is of the opinion that "politics is a man's business", the woman may feel she should accept it too.

A woman's place...

Attitudes are changing fast, but the rural societies of southern Europe still consider that a woman's place is in the field and in the home—equally. Since the young people are moving into the towns, these rural societies tend to be made up of older than average people, which is another reason for their resistance to change. There are enormous differences between the situation in these countries and in northern Europe, where agricultural populations are much smaller.

The farming way of life makes it difficult for women to participate in politics. Their hours of work are already long and hard: besides their farm work they have to cook and wash for a larger-than-average family, without the benefit of many of the facilities which urban households have—washing machines, hot running water, shops at hand, convenience foods. Above all, there are no child care facilities to help with the small children. Distances alone may make it impossible to attend political meetings.

Traditional attitudes and education combine to keep women out of the agricultural unions and the co-operatives, at least in southern Europe. Though rural women may have equal basic schooling, they have not usually acquired the technical knowledge they would need to share decision-making about the farm business and they may be ill-equipped to represent their farms in a co-operative.

Non-participation by rural women in political life is a bigger problem for the countries which have a larger agricultural population. In these, there can be little hope of the number of women in parliament increasing much before rural women come to participate more widely in local government, political parties and professional organisations.

Catalyst of change

Governments can do many things to change this situation. Perhaps the single most important catalyst of change would be the development of the agricultural co-operative movement, which naturally must be open to women. Incentives can be devised to encourage women to join co-operatives and new types of co-operatives can be set up to serve their own needs, such as those involving women who let out rooms for tourists.

The unpaid working woman or family helper must have a proper legal occupational status. It should allow her to play a

full role in every aspect of co-operative work, and to represent the farm in farming organisations, agricultural savings funds and professional associations, besides qualifying her for social insurance and benefits. It should be possible for the family enterprise to be run as a partnership in which she shares in both profits and capital increase. Assistance can be given to enable her to organise ways of earning non-farm income from her own handicrafts, from renting out rooms, for example—the objective being that women may obtain some financial independence.

A fundamental aspect of developing women's participation is education and training: political education on the legislative and social framework and women's equal rights in it; agricultural (technical) training to help them contribute and share in decision-making; farm management training —especially in farm accounts, an area where it is more readily accepted that women should take over (keeping the books at home); training in the management and functions of co-operatives etc.

Rural facilities should be improved, especially child-care centres and transportation services. Finally, a quota system for a minimum share by women in political candidacies and positions would be useful as a transitional, though perhaps not permanent, measure to break down male dominance in politics.

These are just some of the positive actions that could encourage more participation by rural women in political life. Measures such as quotas cannot by themselves adequately change low participation because candidates will not be forthcoming until the deeply rooted attitudes of rural society change. But all these efforts together can gradually bring about a more democratic society in which women have equal opportunities and an equal share in all aspects of life, including politics. ■

ANNA MANGRIOTI
Council for sexual equality, Athens

A moment of history

Let us recall an historic event that occurred only recently. In August 1984, at the Los Angeles Olympic Games, a young Moroccan woman, Nawal El Moutawakel, won the first gold medal ever to be awarded to an Arab woman. "For an Arab woman, winning is really something!" she exclaimed.

The Coliseum held its breath and shed a tear. On the running track, a slip of a girl in a green vest reeled with happiness, leaning forward with her hands on her knees as if the whole weight of the world had suddenly fallen onto her narrow shoulders.

The significance of the occasion was not lost on the Coliseum; it knew that it was experiencing a rare moment. Later, it learned that Nawal El Moutawakel, not content with winning the 400 m hurdles, had just picked up Morocco's first ever gold medal and became the first African woman to achieve that incomparable status. That Wednesday, the young Moroccan not only won a race; she performed a feat likely to spark off a mini-revolution in a continent that had previously been unaccustomed to seeing a woman take such initiatives.

Readers will no doubt remember when African athletes first burst onto the sporting scene, arousing both admiration and hope. When Abebe Bikila won a gold medal in the marathon in 1960, when Wilson Kiprugut improved the Olympic 800 m record in 1964, when Kipchoge Keino beat the 3 000 m world record in 1965, the whole of Africa took inspiration from these events and the world was provided with evidence, of the continent's inexhaustible resources.

Over and above its joyous reaction to these athletic feats, a whole continent demanded the right to ambition and announced its desire to advance itself. Despite the handicaps inherent in chronic under-development and under-equipment, the Kenyan, Ugandan, Ethiopian, Tanzanian and Nigerian athletes have gradually asserted themselves at the highest level, reaping their harvest of medals after each Olympic Games.

Until that Wednesday, women, labouring under social and religious pressures, had been entirely excluded from this general movement. Even though Nawal El Moutawakel's feat was achieved in a race appearing in the Olympic programme for the first time, and in the absence of the Soviets who are usually highly effective in that area, it marked the starting point of a fresh conquest. Not surprisingly, that 22-year-old girl came from a country where sport enjoys special consideration. Morocco, which hosted the Mediterranean Games in 1983, has discovered a new vocation. King Hassan II has fully appreciated the significance and impact of any successes by his country's top representatives, in the Olympic Games or elsewhere. He has fully gauged the potential of a country where 66% of the population are under 23 years of age.

Benoît Heimermann
(Published in *Le Matin*, August 1984)

Sexual violence and the law in Italy

For more than a decade, a lively debate has been in progress in Italy concerning the treatment of sexual violence in criminal law. As a result, numerous proposals for reform, originating mainly from women's rights movements, have got as far as Parliament. But the battle is not over yet.

The outdated, anachronistic provisions of the 1930 Italian Criminal Code, still in force today, reflect an attitude of male dominance which tends to place the blame on the female victim of sexual violence who, having already suffered degradation through the offence itself, is subjected to still more humiliation both before and during the trial.

Firstly, owing to the principle that offences of sexual violence are actionable only on the laying of charges and are not subject to mandatory prosecution, the woman is dissuaded from exercising her right to lay charges by all kinds of pressure (sometimes in the form of actual threats) from the rapist's friends, as well as by influential factors in the local environment. This situation was even more difficult before 1981, when Act No. 442 repealed the statute under which there were no grounds for prosecution if the offender and victim were married.

Secondly, the distinction drawn in Articles 519 and 520 of the Criminal Code between the crime of rape and that of indecent assault, which is subject to a less severe penalty, provides a pretext for sub-

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jecting the woman to embarrassing detailed questioning, which begins with the initial investigation by the criminal police and continues throughout the proceedings. This is designed to ascertain the nature and region of penetration or interference, and may go to the degrading ritual extreme of a forensic medical examination for proof of virginity.

Many legislative proposals have been made to eliminate this oppressive procedure which conspires to place the woman in a position of inferiority and isolation and to prevent her from appealing to criminal justice. The most significant is a popular motion put forward by the women's rights movement as early as 1980. This is an important starting point, being the most mature expression of concern for women, representing an attitude radically opposed to the obsession with the act of rape which typifies current criminal law practice, and also a model for the consolidated Bill drafted by the Justice Committee of the *Camera dei Deputati* (lower house of Parliament) and debated in October 1984.

Safeguarding the victim

This concern for women primarily involves realising that sexual violence does not offend against some separate and distinguishable aspect of personal freedom but against the woman's entire person. Hence the proposal to place offences against sexual freedom in the part of the Criminal Code concerned with offences against the person, thus transcending their present classification among offences against decency and public morals, as though it were these abstract values that needed to be safeguarded rather than the victim's freedom.

The crimes of rape and indecent assault have been brought together under the single offence of sexual violence, which is defined as committing sexual acts against a person with the use of violence or threats. As one effect of this, it should be possible to eliminate investigation procedures which concentrate on the woman's body and organs with utter disregard for her dignity and her person. The penalties are significantly heavier if the act is committed by several people together (collective sexual violence).

The offence of sexual violence is subject to mandatory prosecution, and the trial will therefore be held even without an explicit statement of intent by the woman. In order to overcome her weakness and isolation in such cases, provision is made for women's movements and associations to appear as a party, with the victim's consent, to help ascertain the facts and establish the criminal liability.

Two further points in the feminists' proposal are a ban on questioning the victim on her private life and sexual relations to avoid turning the trial of rapists into a witch-hunt of their victims, and recognition of an area of sexual freedom in the case of consenting minors.

Reverses in Parliament

As stated above, many of these principles have been embodied in a consolidated text of the Justice Committee of the *Camera dei Deputati*. Unfortunately, in the course of the parliamentary debate on the Bill—which was approved on 18 October 1984 and transmitted to the Senate for final approval—several amendments were made which considerably altered the basic terms, re-introducing the former preoccupation with the act of rape which it was hoped had been removed for good.

Prosecution of sexual violence between married or unmarried couples was again made subject to the laying of charges. This is a vital point, since it re-introduces the principle of male sexual dominance by the mere fact of marriage or cohabitation, and also imposes an outdated model of the power relationship within the couple.

The express provision made for women's rights movements and associations to appear in court for the victim has been dropped, which means that sexual violence is again reduced to a private matter concerning the woman herself, without any public dimension or moral implications for society as a whole or for the more general issue of the male-female relationship.

Finally, it is stipulated that sexual relations with children under 14, even with their consent, always constitute presumed violence, and the same solution is adopted for the mentally sick. Thus the sexual freedom to which even such persons are indubitably entitled is prohibited and made criminal.

Consequently, the contention between preoccupation with the act of rape and concern for women remains unresolved. Within the next few months, the Senate debate on the Bill will show whether the feminist movement is to succeed, in and out of Parliament, in making the law on sexual violence worthy of a civilised nation. ■

GUIDO NEPPI MODONA
Professor of Law, University of Turin

The last 20 years

1964 Fifteen years after Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex", Betty Friedan's "The Feminine Mystique" is published.

1965 Reform of the law relating to marital property (France)

1967 Contraception Act (France).
Medical Termination of Pregnancy Act (United Kingdom—except Northern Ireland).

1969 8 March: International Women's Day.

1970 Divorce Act (Italy).

1971 Manifesto by 343 French women who admit to having had abortions.

1973 Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Act (Denmark).

1974 Françoise Giroud appointed State Secretary for Women's Affairs (France).

1975 International Women's Year.
Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Act (France and Sweden).
Divorce reform (France).

1976 Voluntary Termination of Pregnancy Act (Federal Republic of Germany).

1978 Contraception and Abortion Acts (Italy and Luxembourg).

1980 Physicist Yvonne Coquet-Burhat becomes the first woman to be appointed to the Academy of Sciences (France).

1981 Entry into force of the United Nations Convention prohibiting sexual discrimination.

1983 Act on occupational equality between women and men (France).

1984 Abortion Act (Netherlands).

1985 Nairobi Conference as part of the United Nations Decade for Women.

Rasmussen case: the rights of the father

The case originates in an application lodged with the European Commission of Human Rights against Denmark in 1979 by Mr Per Kron Rasmussen, a Danish citizen.

Mr Rasmussen married in 1966, and in 1971 his wife gave birth to a daughter. Despite doubts as to whether he was the father, Mr Rasmussen refrained from bringing any action to contest paternity.

The applicant and his wife divorced in 1975. In accordance with an agreement signed by both ex-spouses, Mr Rasmussen undertook not to institute any proceedings to contest paternity, and his wife abandoned any claim for maintenance of the child.

In 1976, the applicant's former wife denounced the agreement. Mr Rasmussen then applied to the Court of Appeal for leave to institute proceedings to contest paternity. His application was rejected because it was out of time. Before the Commission, and later before the Court, Mr Rasmussen claimed that he had been the victim of discrimination based on sex and that under the relevant Danish legislation his right of access to the courts in order to challenge paternity was subject to time-limits, whereas his wife could have applied at any time for paternity to be established.

In its judgment given on 28 November 1984, the Court held unanimously that there had been no violation of Article 14 of the Convention, taken in conjunction with Article 6 or with Article 8.

Sex discrimination in the United Kingdom

The European Court of Human Rights recently heard the latest in a long line of cases involving the United Kingdom. The case concerned the sex discrimination allegedly contained in its immigration rules with regard to the husbands of women settled in the United Kingdom.

The case concerned the immigration rules which applied before February 1983. Under those rules, the wife of a man settled in the UK was eligible for admission to the country for settlement. However, the husband of a woman settled there was less favourably treated. He was eligible for admission into the country for settlement only if the wife was a citizen of the UK or Colonies, born in the UK, or one of whose parents was born there.

Although the immigration rules were changed with effect from February 1983 after a major political row, the sex discrimination remains in the treatment of the spouse of a person settled in the UK. Under the present rules, the wife of a man settled there will be admitted for settlement. But the husband of a woman settled there will only be admitted for settlement if the wife is a British citizen.

In May 1983, the European Commission of Human Rights (which referred the case to the European Court) unanimously held that the immigration rules were contrary to the European Convention because they did not secure the right to respect for family life without sex discrimination. The Commission rejected (by twelve votes to nil) the astonishing arguments of the Government that the Convention does not apply to immigration control, that there was no interference with family life because a woman can live abroad with her husband, and that the sex discrimination is necessary for the economic well-being of the country at a time of high unemployment.

The Commission concluded that any such economic argument (based on the stereotyped assumption that husbands, but not wives, work) could not justify sex discrimination "and the detrimental consequences thereof on the family lives of the women concerned".

There are two general issues raised by the proceedings in the Court. First, it is a matter of concern that the Government should be authorising its lawyers to persist in litigation that a first-year law student would recognise to be doomed to failure. It is especially disturbing that the Government should adopt this approach with regard to overt sex discrimination in an important public context.

The second point of general importance is that this case (like its predecessors concerning corporal punishment in the Isle of Man and in schools, the closed shop, telephone tapping, the fights of prisoners and homosexuals) needs to be decided in Strasbourg because, by contrast with all other member states of the Council of Europe, we lack a domestic judicial remedy for state actions which contravene the Convention.

In the immigration case heard by the Court, the Commission held, by eleven votes to one, that this absence of domestic remedies is itself a breach of the Convention. So inadequate is British protection of human rights that, in the 1980 case of Fernandes, the Court of Appeal held that there was not even a legal obligation on the Secretary of State to consider the Government's duties under the Convention before deporting someone.

The attitude of the Government to sex discrimination in immigration resembles the approach of Blackstone to the legal disabilities to which a woman was subjected by the common law of the eighteenth century. Those disabilities (concerning the right to own property, to sign a contract and to vote) were, according to Blackstone, "for the most part intended for her protection and benefit. So great a favourite is the female sex of the laws of England".

The European Court of Human Rights will undoubtedly impose a more modern, and more exacting, theory of equality. Whether Conservative backbenchers approve or not, the Government will then have no choice but to liberalise the immigration rules. ■

(Published in The Guardian*—24 September 1984)*

DAVID PANNICK
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Unions and the working woman

Clara Zetkin's words on the difficulties involved in organising working women into unions, written at the beginning of the century, have lost little of their relevance today.

"There is a common factor which makes it singularly difficult to organise working women into unions: their very womanhood. The role the family has always played, and to some extent still does, as the reason for earning and existing, and the position of inferiority women have long occupied, and to a degree still occupy, in family and society, conspire to develop traits and attitudes in working women which can only be described as hindrances to association."

Clara Zetkin, Die Gleichheit

What is to stop working women combining to form unions? Womanhood and again womanhood is the invariable answer.

Many anti-trade union attitudes among working women, which ultimately stem from the very fact that they are women, prejudice them permanently against unions, but others actually tend to make them non-organisable.

Not that all working women are against trade unions: a large proportion are union members nowadays, though the situation varies greatly from country to country. The Nordic countries are way in front—Finland, Denmark, Iceland and Sweden. Then comes a large middle group: Belgium, Ireland, Italy, Norway and the United Kingdom. Despite repeatedly assuring the European Court of Justice of its progressiveness as regards sexual equality in the workplace, the Federal Republic of Germany is only the leading tailender for female unionisation. Dutch women—despite their reputation for emancipation in other areas—account for a very small per-

centage of union members. Then come the Swiss, with the smallest Community country, Luxembourg, easily last.

But women's increasing union-mindedness is not matched by the number of women who hold union office. The Danish FTF is the sole member of the European Trade Union Confederation with a woman president. On the whole, women are seriously underrepresented in decision-making bodies. For example, Belgium's CSC has 16 on the 250-member national committee, two on the 36-member executive committee and none at all on the seven-member general purposes committee.

Regionally, the situation is almost as bleak. Three of the seventeen unions affiliated to the Federal German DGB have no women members at all. 10% of regional office bearers are women and women head five of the 774 district branches.

Career v family

Why this obvious underrepresentation at higher level? The Swiss Trade Union Federation puts it down to the dual call of career and family, low female union membership and inconvenient meeting times. The low level of female membership may be the reason in Switzerland, but not in the Nordic countries. But inconvenient meeting times definitely prevent many women from taking a more active part in union life,

Country	Number of women union members
Finland	SAK 43% TVK 81%
Denmark	LO 43% FTF 56%
Iceland	ASI 46,7%
Sweden	LO 41% TCO 58,1%
Belgium	CSC 33% FTGB 30%
Ireland	ICTU 32%
Italy	CGIL 32%
Norway	Lo 33%
United Kingdom	TUC 33%
Federal Republic of Germany	DGB 21%
Netherlands	FNV 13,7%
Switzerland	SGB/USS 12% CNG/CSC 11%
Luxembourg	LCGB 8%

and the British TUC, for example, as point 6 of a 10-point paper on sexual equality in union life, quite rightly wants pay agreements to include provision for time off work without loss of pay so that, where possible, union meetings can be held during working hours. Point 7 demands that, if meetings have to be held outside working hours, everything possible should be done to provide child-minding arrangements so as to free both parents.

But whether child minding is enough to interest women in union activity remains to be seen. The fact is that unions have often tended to put working women's interests last. Countries with high female employment also have high part-time employment. In Europe as a whole, approximately 90% of all part-time workers are women, and they slot less easily into union work not simply because only part of their day is devoted to "paid" work, but also because trade unions—including leading women trade unionists—have mostly rejected part-time work. Until such time as women can bring the unions their specific problems, and—for example—the unions accept women's legitimate interest in guaranteed part-time work or a guaranteed working day not based on the general 40-hour week, women will not be able, or prepared, to join in greater numbers. ■

HORTENSE HÖRBURGER
Journalist, Brussels

To denounce without distorting

The author, a young Algerian woman, recounts her experience of life in two different cultures.

I should like to say first of all how difficult it is to speak of the indignity of certain existences, to express the indignity I myself feel at being obliged to denounce a world I should like to defend but whose complexity I cannot fully depict. The problem is how to denounce it without distorting it, without indulging in caricature. How to succeed in convincing myself that the need to spare women such suffering does not become an excuse for erasing all differences, that there are liberties over there that cannot be understood here, and that there are joys in being among other women in their backyards, with the children, in laughing or laundering, reacting both timidly and brazenly whenever the doors open on to the outside world.

What a multiplicity of unexpected stereotypes. I so wanted to forget my strange intimacy with that country; I was so anxious to believe there was neither an inside nor an outside world but only a world of men and of women. Women like myself who no longer want to be denied trees, skies and books... What I actually found was a world of blushing aunts, shocked at seeing me speak to men like a street urchin, riding a donkey in broad daylight or going to market with my face uncovered. They didn't know about my halts in the harvested fields, beneath a tree between two villages, where I could smoke a cigarette and, for a few moments, no longer have to watch my every action, my every look.

Through the streets of the town they flit, all white in the sunlight, soliciting you with the one eye visible behind their veils, so silent, so disappointingly anonymous, so shockingly ordinary, their ankles scarcely visible, those "ghosts" who frighten children arriving from France: the prostitutes of the port of Oran—so veiled and yet so naked that everyone can recognise them from their distinct hemlines which set them apart from the respectable women who pass by, also veiled in white, doomed to a cyclopean existence.

With my short hair, my trousers, my fashionable clogs, the children jeered at me, taking me for an effeminate man, despite my breasts.

Living behind closed doors

It has taken a whole lifetime to learn to recognise such subtle signs: suppressing your laughter in front of men, lowering your eyes in your father's presence, living behind closed doors—and waiting. Waiting for your brother to finish eating before helping yourself to food, waiting for the husband who will be chosen for you, afraid of "going wrong" before having done anything at all, with your mind on nothing but being useless and unproductive, non-existent outside your own family, preserving your only marketable commodity, that mysterious piece of flesh between your thighs that men think only of pillaging; your head full of the thought of women with shaven heads, exposed naked in the streets and stoned: disgraced for merely having wanted to live.

Rectitude, as they call it, is learned through terror (didn't my mother use to tell me that women were "closed up" by their godmothers until their wedding day?) as well as through pain (the atrocious suffering caused by the hot pepper with which they smear the genitals of girls caught playing with boys), a rectitude from which the more modernistic-minded claim that women will not stray as a result of receiving an education or taking off their veils. The very word horrifies me because it is the pretext for all the forms of coercion, the cause of incessant blackmailing by mothers, the destiny which tolerates no misconduct.

How is one to revolt against virtue when it would implicate one's sister, one's brother and one's cousin? Once the irreparable has happened, do not parents have the power of life and death?

Can I speak of that country without lying? Perhaps my view of things has become outdated. I am assured it has. Girls go about freely, I am told—even though there is a morality squad which forbids them to consort with men who are not their relatives. They also study, apparently—even though a woman on her own cannot find accomodation. What is more, they marry as they please—even if smart European doctors are restoring virginities on an industrial scale. Indeed, women have become so expensive that a manual worker has no end of difficulty in getting married.

Humiliation and silence

In France, that alternative home where the rule of law prevails, there are no backyards full of laughter. There, women live alone, often with no one to turn to. They are left with their repressed anger, confined to the smallest of spaces, alternating between ingenuity and dissimulation. The only thing to do is to play for time and divide up your conscience. It is so difficult not to lose heart when, in order to live, you have to separate yourself from your family, abandon your sisters, become lost... And those who have done so are indeed lost.

Fathers panic at this attack on their values. In this country of humiliation and silence, it is in violence that they quell their fear and overcome their shock at the liberty their daughters want to take with themselves and with others. Protection and coercion is the answer. They must be married off as fast as possible, deprived of those vital papers, then, during a holiday trip, handed over to an older sister or an aunt. Let them wait over there until they are old enough to marry. The brother will raise no objections—or seldom will.

In the same family, one sister is "with the army", another in Algeria, and the third is bringing up the children of a man she did not choose.

How can one fully convey the humiliation of a gynaecological examination whose purpose is to obtain a certificate of virginity that can be shown to suspicious neighbours? That look in the French doctor's eyes! The implausible wedding night with the women waiting outside the bedroom, ready to rush in at any moment to demand to see the blood-stained sheet, accomplices in their daughters' misery.

But what law can we invoke to defend ourselves? Where are we to go without money, without work and often without papers? To whom are we to complain without creating permanent rifts? It is difficult to legislate for such distress, but if only there were reception centres that did not turn out to be re-education centres, if only there was someone prepared to listen and explain to the parents, we would be so much less alone. ■

ZOULIKA BOUKORTT
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Resolving sexual harassment in Canada

No one knows exactly how extensive sexual harassment is, because of the difficulties of definition and the limited amount of comprehensive analysis. Nevertheless, Canadian and American surveys reveal that anywhere from 15 to 70% of women have, at one time, been sexually harassed in their jobs.

In Canada, individuals who believe they have been sexually harassed may take complaints to anti-discrimination agencies, generally called human rights commissions. Because of Canada's federal nature, there are 11 commissions, one federal and ten provincial. Each enforces a statute which bans discrimination on specific grounds such as sex, age and race. The federal commission covers approximately 10% of workers (and their clients) grouped largely in Federal Government departments and agencies, the armed forces, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, television and radio networks and some of the country's largest companies—including banks, railways, and airlines. All others fall under provincial jurisdiction.

All jurisdictions prohibit discrimination based on sex, but only the human rights statutes of Canada, and of the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec specifically prohibit harassment. For example, a section added to the Canadian Human Rights Act in 1982 prohibits harassment on all grounds. For greater certainty, a subsection was included stating that sexual harassment is "deemed to be harassment". This prohibition of harassment covers employment, the provision of goods and services, and accomodation. The Province of Ontario's Human Rights Code bans "harassment in the workplace", and makes specific reference to "sexual solicitation or advance".

Only in recent years has sexual harassment received legal recognition and been given a name.

There is a trend toward inclusion of "harassment" in legislation but its absence has not hindered commissions from accepting and dealing with complaints. For example, the policy of the province of Alberta's human rights commission begins: "Sexual harassment, being discrimination on the grounds of sex, is a violation of the Individual's Rights Protection Act". That said, however, most jurisdictions did not accept formal complaints until 1979, and there was much wringing of hands before it was generally agreed that sexual harassment was indeed discrimination. The argument was finally laid to rest with the realisation that sexual harassment and other forms of discrimination share many similarities. This explains why legislation which prohibits sexual harassment does so in the general context of harassment.

Unwelcome sexual conduct

What, then, is sexual harassment? It is unwelcome sexual conduct. It may be verbal or physical, direct or indirect, one incident or many. It ranges from coerced sexual activity, to unsolicited physical contact, to repeated propositions, to gender-based insults and taunting. The victim may be subjected to physical assault, patting, threats, leering, graffiti, practical jokes or paternalism which results in undermining self-respect. Almost all sexual harassment is the assertion of power by men over women who are seen as vulnerable sex objects. It is the perfect expression of the stereotyped expectations of male and female roles. Racism categorises people by colour, sexual harassment by gender. This explains why harassment can be equally serious coming from co-workers, and why it may refer to either sexuality or gender. Women in non-traditional jobs are especially prone to remarks such as "why aren't you at home being a good mother?" and "you cannot do a man's job".

Poisoned work environment

Generally sexual harassment falls into two types. The first has been called "*quid pro quo*", where submission becomes a condition of employment (or accomodation or the provision of goods and services) and refusal results in denial of one of the above, or dismissal. The second type, known as the "poisoned work environment", finds employees forced to work in an atmosphere of stress caused by humiliation, insults, and hostility. While this may arise from a rejection of sexual advances, it may also result from the attitudes and behaviour of supervisors and co-workers towards women in the workplace.

Most complaints of sexual harassment filed with commissions are of the *"quid pro quo"* type involving the more severe forms of conduct when the victims either quit or are fired. A poisoned work environment is

more difficult to establish, for it is the cumulative effect of often subtle behaviour which is so damaging to victims. Often, job performance suffers, giving employers an apparently legitimate excuse for disciplinary action or dismissal.

Employers are legally responsbile for the harassment they commit. When it comes from their employees or agents, employers can be absolved of responsibility if they establish that they did not consent, exercised all due diligence to prevent such acts, and subsequently mitigated or avoided their consequences.

Many organisations, such as municipalities, banks and universities, and Canada's largest employer, the Federal Government, have developed policies and procedures for dealing with the problem. When necessary, they have disciplined offenders and compensated victims for lost wages and hurt feelings. Unions have become active, insisting on action by management while at the same time negotiating clauses in collective agreements to provide protection for members. Depending on the situation, individuals may have several avenues of redress and may use any or all of them.

With publicity and the establishment of redress mechanisms, complaints of harassment initially increase. But organisations which have shown a concern for fairness are discovering that programmes which reduce harassment make good economic sense for they mean lower absenteeism and turnover rates, and greater productivity. Elimination of sexual harassment in Canada will take years, perhaps generations. But with admission that a problem exists, passage of legal sanctions, establishment of redress systems, and public education, the necessary first steps have been taken. ■

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A woman's life in Switzerland

Just last October, Swiss feminists were putting out the flags to celebrate the long-awaited election of the first women ever to sit on the Federal Council. But already this year two events have taken the gilt off their success. First, there was the crushing defeat of the popular initiative aimed at establishing compulsory, general maternity insurance (only 16% in favour), and then the result of the referendum initiated by ultra-conservative circles against the new marriage law. There is a great risk that, next autumn, the people will scuttle the law to replace the patriarchal provisions in the Civil Code, which Parliament has spent a long time preparing.

Is it not at least partly the fault of semi-direct democracy that the status of women is improving so slowly in Switzerland? This political system—in theory, the best because it makes the people truly sovereign, requiring them to take a decision on every constitutional amendment and empowering them to decide on every piece of legislation—can come up with the worst results. This is because the Swiss electoral body, like all peoples, is basically conservative and will almost systematically veto the slightest social innovation. Upsetting the long-established order governing re-

Swiss women recently celebrated the election of the first woman ever to sit on the Federal Council: does this event herald a real step forward for the position of women in Swiss society?

lations between the sexes becomes a difficult task in these circumstances.

It is for this reason that, today, the women of the two half-cantons of Appenzell still cannot participate in the communal and cantonal assemblies—the grandiose open-air *Landsgemeinden* in which the entire male population, standing, with their swords in their belts, takes part. It is for the same reason that all Swiss women had to wait until 1971 before being granted the right to vote at federal level. At the end of the 1960s, when French, German and Italian women were protesting against the patriarchal structures of society, Swiss feminists had got no further than fighting for their basic civic rights.

At present, in spite of the number of women in the Parliaments which is, all in all, fairly satisfactory compared with neighbouring countries (10% in the Federal Assembly), it is still exceptional to find women in the executive councils, even at municipal level.

Subordinate positions

In the economic sector, the situation is scarcely better. Three-quarters of working women (one in every two adult women) are in the service sector, which is particularly affected by the recession. The women are less well-qualified than men and the vast majority of them work in subordinate positions. For example, in the Federal Administration, there is only a small percentage of women in senior positions. Similarly, there are very few women in the media, where the senior posts are held almost exclusively by men. Swiss society seems to be singularly male-dominated—rather like the first class coaches on the Geneva–Berne–Zurich railway line where, at certain times of day, you see nothing but the dark suits, briefcases and cigars of politicians and big-business men.

If Switzerland has not had to rely on women to keep its economic machinery turning, it is perhaps because of the presence of foreigners. Since the end of the last

century, the country's political and geographical situation has always enabled it to rely massively on immigrant workers when labour was short. It was better to take on Spaniards and Italians in factories and building sites than to train Swiss women, whom tradition had prepared for other work.

Almost the entire population is still convinced that woman's place is in the home. Even when she has a job, the home remains the focus of her existence. For it, she often foregoes promotion and, almost always, a good part of her spare time. Indeed, husbands who help in the home are very rare: fewer than 10%, according to a recent survey.

Associations: a window to the world

These Swiss women, who are housewives and mothers first and foremost, nonetheless keep a window open on the outside world through their own organisations: their associations. Whether she is a member of a women's gymnastic club, a group helping battered wives or a local section of the women's rights association, more than one women in three belongs to a women's organisation. Most of them, such as the powerful Alliance of Women's Clubs (*Alliance de sociétés féminines*) or the Catholic Women's League (*Ligue des femmes catholiques*), were founded early this century and had the time, while waiting for the right to vote, to develop into a vast solid and original network. Women feel at ease in them, they work there quietly but effectively as militants or as voluntary workers, and they rely on values which are rather different from those generally current in male society: mutual help, a taste for practical matters, and patience.

Perhaps it may be thought that these associations are likely to become a ghetto and to keep women on the fringe of the world of politics and economics. This was certainly the case in the past. But today, increasingly, links are being forged between that world and the other. And they are not unsuccessful. A popular initiative launched for International Women's Year led to recognition of the equality of the sexes in the Constitution—recognition which American women are still awaiting. In 1982, women consumers managed to achieve acceptance by a popular vote of the principle of price monitoring.

In this peaceful, well-endowed, contented country there are women who, nevertheless, are trying to alter the established order. They are less militant than their sisters in other European countries and often wary of the label of "feminist", for fear it might be taken as extremist, yet they pursue with similar determination the aim they have set themselves: to enable women to take their place on an equal footing in society, while bringing to it the positive values assigned to them in their traditional role in that society. ■

GABRIELLE NANCHEN
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Violence against women: a Scandinavian perspective

Many nations proclaim equality between the sexes to be the goal of the future. This was also an official aim in the newly undertaken revision of the Swedish legislation on sexual offences and, at the initiative of the Equality Committee of the Nordic Council of Ministers, a report on "Violence in relationships between couples" has just been published.

With a strong collective voice, women have protested against the abuse of the female body and assaults on personal integrity. The women's movement has undoubtedly played an instrumental role in bringing about ideological changes that in turn have spurred reforms to strengthen the victim's position legally, socially and psychologically.

Over the last decade, public attitudes to violence against women have changed significantly. The author describes how this process has occurred in the Scandinavian countries.

A decade ago, the victim of sexual violence—in order to be a legitimate rape victim—needed to have been violently attacked by a stranger. Others, who were more or less acquainted with the assailant, systematically disqualified as credible rape victims. As the reasoning goes, their behaviour or general conduct initiated, encouraged or provoked the course of events. Responsibility and blame was placed on the woman.

A decade ago, battered women did not exist in Scandinavia. This, of course, is not true. They were merely invisible. A group of Norwegian women who in the mid-1970s wished to establish a crisis shelter were met with scepticism. The authorities doubted whether the problem of domestic violence existed in our part of the world with its advanced policies of sexual equality.

A decade ago, incestuous relations, commonly father-daughter incest, went all but unnoticed. At the most, sexual abuse and exploitation of female children by adult men were taboo subjects.

In July 1985, the World Conference of the United Nations Decade for Women will take place in Nairobi. Attended by women from the whole world, the Conference will review the achievements of the ten-year World Plan of Action of the UN for this decade (1975–1985). Adopted in Mexico in 1975 (International Women's Year) with the subtheme "Equality, Development and Peace", the plan proposes measures to be taken at national level to facilitate the participation of women in the political process. The previous World Conference, held in Copenhagen in 1980 to mark the half-way point of the decade, drew up a programme of action based on the further themes of "Employment, Health and Education".

Times have changed. After the extensive exposure it has received, violence in the private or semi-personal sphere of life is no longer forced out into the periphery of public consciousness. Hidden victimisation has become a political issue.

In 1984, the Swedish law on sexual offences was extensively amended. To a large extent, the legislators incorporated criticism levelled against prejudice and contempt for women practised in the police, or court handling of rape cases. It has, for instance, been made clear that the victim's relationship to the offender does not make the crime less severe, nor can it in any way be judged that for a woman to follow a man into his car or home or to permit him certain advances is contributory to the assault.

Amendments to the law

Protests by Danish women over the discrimination that had been operated against victims of sexual assault after a prior voluntary contact with the man also gave result. The law was revised to ensure a greater certainty for the application of the rape statute.

In principle, there is no formal exception for intra-marital rape within the Nordic countries (excluding Finland): legally, a wife can be raped by her husband. Both Denmark and Sweden have, in the 1980's, introduced female rapists and male victims in the criminal codes. It has been argued that formal equality in this regard cloaks reality, namely the male domain of sexual violence. On the other hand, homosexuals are offered better legal protection. Of greater importance from women's point of view is a different aspect of the statutory approach. To give an example: Sweden last year expanded the legal term, rape, to include anal or oral penetration. Apart from removing an artifical grading of sexual humiliation, this change is expected to reduce offensive questioning on intimate details of the assault.

Denmark, since 1980, and Norway, since 1981, have granted the victim of rape the right to legal aid at public expense, both during the initial questioning and throughout the legal process. The police are requested to inform the woman of this option, subject to court approval.

As far as trials are concerned, a stipulation to protect the victim's right to privacy about her former sexual experience was inserted in the Danish Code of Criminal Procedure and, as explained in the new Swedish rape law, information about the woman's lifestyle is of no relevance. No legal revision was necessary for the acceptance in Denmark of a noteworthy change in court practice. Nowadays, as part of the ordinary criminal proceedings, rape victims are commonly awarded monetary compensation (as a rule some 20–30,000 Danish kroner) for physical and mental damage suffered during or after the assault.

Violence in the home

Lately, much attention has been focused on the violence women face in the sacred privacy of the home. There are close similarities between rape and wife-beating. Both mirror inequality of power status. Sexually violent acts may or may not be part of the battering, and stereotypic notions similar to those attached to the rape victim implicate battered women in sharing blame for the violence.

Attitudinal changes are under way, along with the recognition of private violence as an urgent social problem. Criminal justice authorities have become responsive in expressing society's disapproval. It is also of interest that originally the Norwegian compensation scheme for victims expressly excluded family members, but subsequent to pressure they are now entitled to financial redress.

Efforts to combat the invisibility surrounding women victims of male violence primarily stem from the work by crisis centres, appearing in the wake of the women's movement. Their contribution is most evident in Norway and Denmark. The earliest shelter for battered women (and rape victims) was created 1978 in the capital of Norway. First, the authorities had to be convinced of the existing need, and the running of an emergency phone provided plentiful documentation. Most local initiatives have followed the same procedure. By early 1984, more than fifty Norwegian crisis phones/centres were in operation, covering half of the nation's municipalities. State funding has improved, but reliance on volunteers is the most distinct feature of the whole undertaking. Within a period of less than five years, Danish women's groups started close to twenty shelters that are the fundamental pillar in offering protection and assistance to battered women.

Self-help

The overall common ideology stresses "help in order to self-help", the principle that women can help each other and themselves to organize their lives and restore self-respect. Female solidarity, collective sharing and non-institutionalised relations between co-workers and residents are thus guiding beliefs.

Incest involves a specific form of violence towards girls and young women, which for long has not been taken seriously enough. Women have begun to talk more openly about sexual abuse suffered from a father or other adult male in the family. Shame and pain scare many victims for life. The law can be seen as a necessary but often inapt or even destructive tool in aiding those sexually molested by guardians. With an emerging social awareness of their plight, women's experience of working with other victims of physical and sexual violence will hopefully provide help in these cases of the most secret of sexual violence. ■

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